

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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DIA WASHDC

USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MORG, HO

SUBJECT: PRESS COMMENTARY ON CHANGES IN HONDURAN MILITARY

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA 1203, (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1222,

(C) TEGUCIGALPA 1245, (D) TEGUCIGALPA 1261

BEGIN SUMMARY: THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE EDITORIAL COMMENT CONCERNING THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES. MOST NEWSPAPER COVERAGE HAS BEEN LIMITED TO NEWS COVERAGE AND INTERVIEWS WITH INFLUENTIAL CIVILIANS AND AS OF MIDDAY APRIL 2 ONLY TIEMPO HAD DEVOTED ITS LEAD EDITORIAL TO THE SUBJECT. END SUMMARY.

1. TEGUCIGALPA'S EL DIA SCOOPED ALL OTHER NEWSPAPERS INTERVIEWS WITH POLITICIANS IN ITS EDITION OF APRIL 1. ITS HEADLINE ASKS THE QUESTION "MINI-COUP AGAINST LOPEZ?"
EL DIA QUOTES NATIONALIST PARTY PRESIDENT RAFAEL

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BARDALES AS SAYING THAT MELGAR'S ASSUMPTION OF HIS NEW

POSITION IS AN INTERNAL AFFAIR OF THE ARMED FORCES
BUT THAT HE IS PERSONALLY PLEASED BECAUSE "MELGAR IS A
MAN OF DEMOCRATIC IDEAS." HE QUALIFIED HIS APPROVAL
BY SAYING THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO HAVE REMOVED
LOPEZ IN FAVOR OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.
CARLOS ROBERTO REINA, LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT
FACTION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY TOLD EL DIA THAT LOPEZ HAS
LOST "EFFECTIVE POWER" IN THE CHANGE. HE FEELS THAT
IF LOPEZ HAD BEEN GIVEN A CHOICE HE WOULD HAVE PREFERRED
TO RELINQUISH THE ROLE OF CHIEF OF STATE WHILE RETAINING
THE POSITION AS CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, THE POSITION
OF REAL POWER. HE ALSO REGARDS THE ELIMINATION OF
THE BRIGADE STRUCTURE AS A BLOW TO LOPEZ. REINA STATED
THAT ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO SEE ANY CHANGE IN THE
POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE ARMED FORCES, ANY MOVE TO
THE RIGHT WOULD PROVOKE CHAOS AND VIOLENCE.

2. EL DIA QUOTED MARCO VIRGILIO CARIAS, THE VICE RECTOR
OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, AS SAYING THE CHANGE REPRESENTS A TURN TO
THE RIGHT, PROVOKED BY THE PRESSURES OF THE CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION,
FENAGH. HE WAS QUOTED AS SAYING, "THE NAMING OF
COLONEL MELGAR DESTROYS THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL PLANS
TOWARD THE RURAL SECTOR AND WILL STALL THE LOPEZ
AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM." EL DIA ADDED THAT FEUH,
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY ASSOCIATION, WAS
GREATLY CONCERNED WITH THE CHANGE AND REGARDED MELGAR
AS ONE OF THE STRONGEST RIGHTISTS IN THE HONDURAN
ARMY. EL DIA ALSO REPORTED THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC
LABOR CONFEDERATION, CGT, HAD CALLED AN EMERGENCY MEETING
TO EVALUATE RECENT EVENTS.

3. LA PRENSA OF APRIL 2 PRINTED THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE
COUNCIL BULLETIN AND SEVERAL INTERVIEWS. JORGE FIDEL
DURON, ADVISOR TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND FORMER FOREIGN
MINISTER, REPORTS LA PRENSA, VIEWS THE CHANGE AS ROUTINE
AND NOTED THAT LOPEZ HAS SEVERAL TIMES MENTIONED STEPPING
DOWN. DURON ADDED THAT LOPEZ WAS TIRED OF GOVERNING.
FORMER PRESIDENT RAMON ERNESTO CRUZ ALSO TOLD LA PRENSA
THAT THE CHANGE WAS "NORMAL." HE ADDED THAT THE CHANGE
DID NOT CONSTITUTE A "MINI COUP" AND THAT THE DIVISION
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OF LOPEZ'S RESPONSIBILITIES WAS LOGICAL BECAUSE THE
HONDURAN CONSTITUTION ANTICIPATES A SEPARATION OF THE
CHIEF OF STATE AND CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES POSITION.
HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THIS WOULD BE A FIRST STEP TOWARD
THE RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. IN HIS INTER-
VIEW WITH LA PRENSA LIBERAL PARTY PERSONALITY RAMON
VILLEDA BERMUDEZ SAID THAT THE CHANGE WAS "NOT UNEXPECTED."
HE SAID THAT THERE HAS BEEN DISSATISFACTION IN THE ARMED

FORCES AND THAT THE MOVE IS A FIRST STEP TO "REGAIN LOST PRESTIGE." VILLEDA ADDED THAT THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS REMOVED LOPEZ FROM EFFECTIVE POWER, LEAVING HIM THE CONDOLENCE OF THE CHIEF OF STATE POSITION.

4. IN A FULL PAGE NEWS STORY IN ITS APRIL 2 EDITION, THE SAN PEDRO SULA DAILY, TIEMPO, CARRIED STRAIGHT NEWS COVERAGE ABOUT MELGAR'S NEW ROLE AND SAID THAT MANY OFFICERS WOULD BE MADE AMBASSADORS OR MILITARY ATTACHES. TIEMPO ADDED THAT THOSE NOT ACCEPTING THOSE POSITIONS WOULD BE RETIRED. TIEMPO COMMENTED ON THE FAILURE OF THE SHORT-LIVED BRIGADE STRUCTURE AND STATED THAT MILITARY OFFICERS NOW HOLDING CABINET POSITIONS WOULD BE REPLACED BY OTHER OFFICERS. THE PAPER ALSO COMMENTED THAT MINECON BENNATON AND MINNATRESOURCES ESCOTO WOULD BE REPLACED. TIEMPO SAID THAT LOPEZ WAS WORKING NORMALLY IN HIS OFFICE AND WAS BEING SUPPORTED IN HIS ROLE OF CHIEF OF STATE, PARTICULARLY REGARDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICY, BY THE OFFICER CORPS. THE PAPER ENDED ITS NEWS STORY BY REPEATING THE ROMORS THAT SOME OFFICERS HAVE BBBEN IMPRISONED, ARE UNDER HOUSE ARREST, OR HAVE BEEN EXPELLED FROM THE COUNTRY. THIS HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY DENIED.

5. IN ITS APRIL 2 LEAD EDITORAL, TIEMPO SAYS THAT THE ASCENSION OF MELGAR AS ARMED FORCES CHIEF IMPLIES "A GREATER DEDICATION" TO MILITARY MATTERS ON THE PART OF THE OFFICER CORPS AND THAT THE CHANGE IS APPROPRIATE BECAUSE IT WILL ALLOWLOPEZ MORE TIME TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY. TIEMPO SAYS THAT SINCE LOPEZ'S 1972 COUP THERE HAS BEEN MUCH INDECISION AND MALADMINISTRATION IN HONDURAS. THE EDITORIAL SAYS THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO OVERCOME THE INERTIA THAT WAS LEADING THE COUNTRY

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TOWARD COLLAPSE. REFERRING TO THE APPARENT NEW ROLE FOR YOUNGER OFFICERS, TIEMPO CONCLUDED THAT THESE MEN ARE CONCERNED WITH EFFICIENCY AND HONEST ADMINISTRATION AND THAT THEY ARE DETERMINED TO END CORRUPTION AND MOVE THE MILITARY AND COUNTRY FORWARD. THE TIEMPO EDITORIAL ENDS BY SAYING THAT THE NEWSPAPER UNDERSTANDS THAT LOPEZ HIMSELF CHOSE THIS COURSE, IN COOPERATION WITH HIS FELLOW OFFICERS, AND THEY LOOK FORWARD TO THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

6. RADIO COVERAGE OF THE EVENTS HAS BEEN LARGELY RESTRICTED TO NEWS ITEMS. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT COMMENTARY TO DATE WAS BY ALAN PADGETT WHO EXPRESSED MILD APPROVAL OF THE ACTIONS OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS.

7. COMMENT: SINCE REAL EXTENT AND MEANING OF ARMED
FORCES CHANGES ARE NOT FULLY KNOWN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC,
A SIGNIFICANT ANALYSIS OF PRESS AND PUBLIC VIEWS WILL HAVE TO AWAIT
GREATER PUBLIC INFORMATION AND UNDERSTANDING AS THE CHANGES
ARE ANNOUNCED.

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